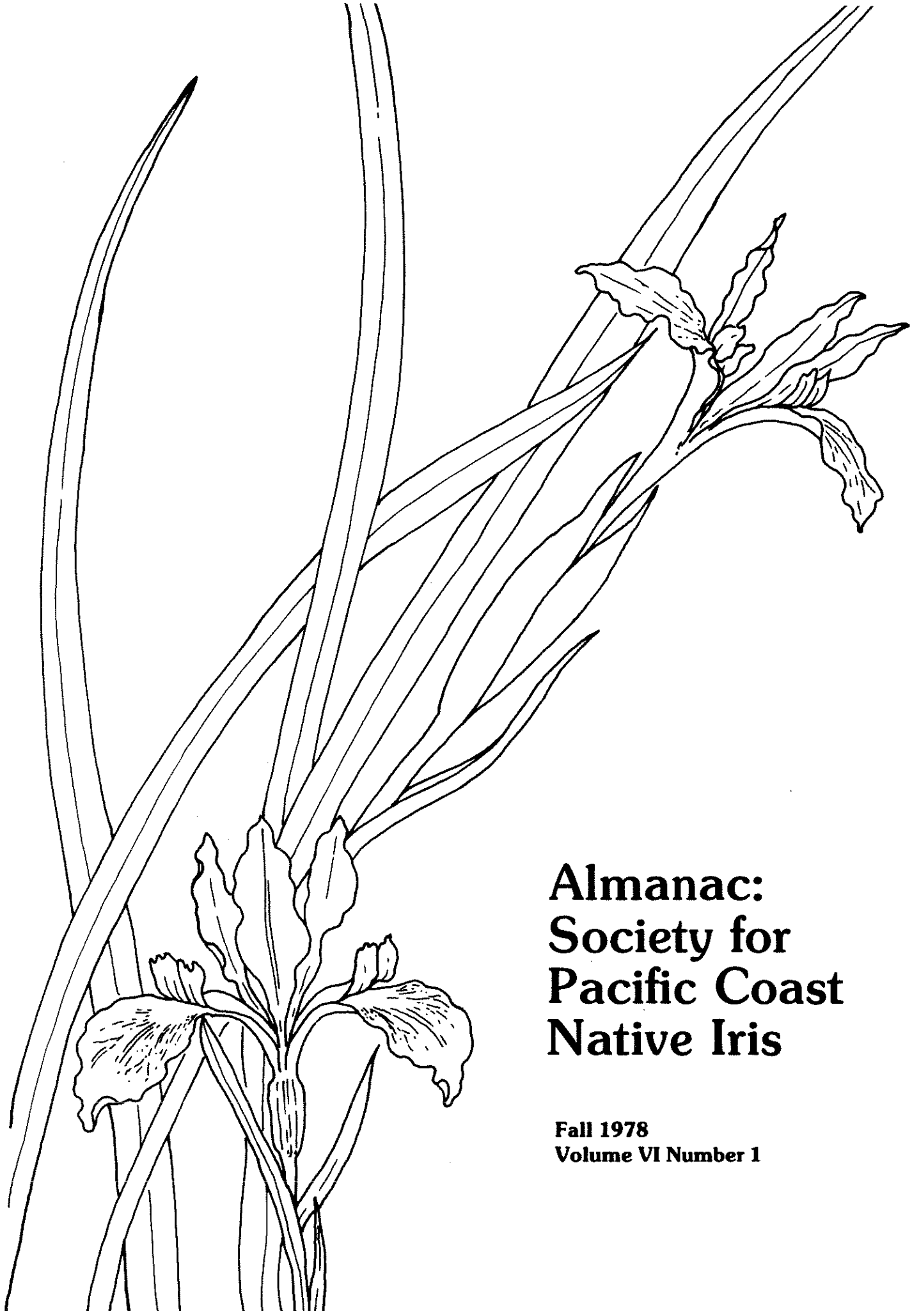

Almanac: Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris

Fall 1978
Volume VI Number 1

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIETY FOR PACIFIC COAST NATIVE IRIS

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris is a section of The American Iris Society: membership in the latter is a prerequisite for membership in the SPCNI.

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FROM THE EDITOR:

Looking forward to the 1979 iris season, we find that our Pacific Coast irises hold the greatest promise for a wealth of bloom. Most of our natives are being grown in pots; they seem to be resisting the ills plaguing other types of the iris family.

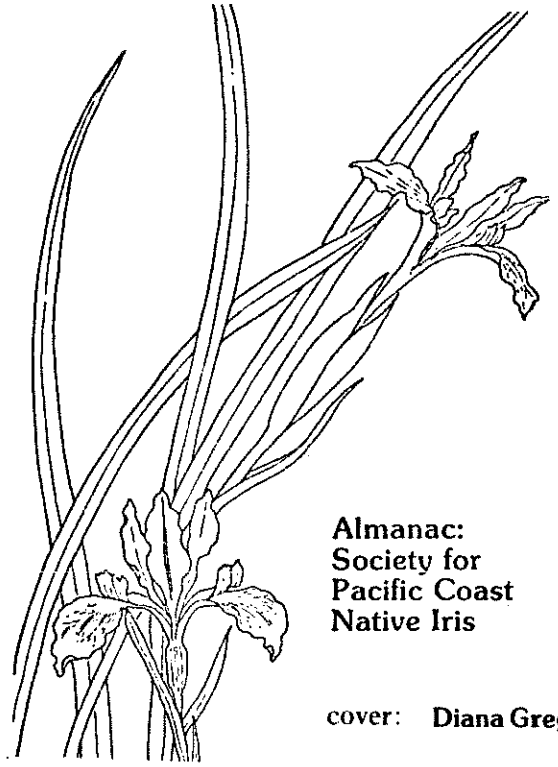
Are you planning to be in northern California in late January? Roy Davidson is scheduled to speak at Oakland's East Bay Garden Center on Sunday, January 28. It is the annual potluck luncheon given by Sydney B. Mitchell Iris Society, when its members welcome other irisarians as guests. For further information phone Jim McWhirter at (415) 538-7989.

Please stock up on black and white film before the onset of bloom season. The American Iris Society will be having a photograph contest for all sorts of irises so that we will be better provided with illustrations. No color this time round; and while you're snapping pictures, remember to take shots of iris in the landscape, such as Fred Boutin tells us about in this issue.

The Pacific Coast native iris were inadvertently omitted this year from the Judges' Choice Ballot, but Ann Dasch says judges may still send her their nominations for the three they consider best.

Assignments made for the Spring *Almanac*: an interview with our first vice-president, Duane Meek, veteran hunter who roams the northern California territory with an eye out for native irises (shades of Dr. Riddle!); one with Caroline Spiller, who plans the propagation of native iris for the Strybing Arboretum Plant Sale; one with Joe Ghio concerning seedling prospects at Bay View gardens in Santa Cruz. Write us your ideas for other interviews and articles. We'll be at Santa Barbara Botanic Garden next month and plan to ask Dara Emery about his plantings. With any luck we may also get to the Northwest in 1979.

Olive



Almanac: Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris

cover: **Diana Gregory**

From the President

Another leaf has turned in the continuing history of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris, and with the turning of that leaf I extend to you my first greetings as the fourth president of our society. It is a privilege to follow in the footsteps of Ray Chesnik, August Phillips and Francesca Thoolen.

The major project facing the SPCNI in the immediate future is to arrange for an endowment fund to underwrite the cost of the Riddle Cup, given each year to the winner of the Sydney B. Mitchell award for a Pacific Coast native iris.

I hope each of you will participate in this program when the opportunity arrives.

Best wishes to each and all of you as we complete the activities of 1978 and look forward to the New Year.

Glenn F. Corlew

The Stambach Strain at Orleans

Francesca Thoolen

George Stambach was well known as a distributor of seeds of Pacific Coast native iris. He always carried packets of seed to give to anyone showing interest. True to character, he supplied me with seed to take to the French International Iris Congress in Orleans, France, this year. He also supplied me with slides to show at the Congress, and asked me for a report on his irises growing in the trials there: a row of mixed seedlings of what is now generally known as the Stambach strain.

His slides were well received and the program in which I showed them concluded with several questions about the cultivation of Pacific Coast irises. Many, I think, were hearing of them for the first time.

The season in Orleans was quite late, because of rain which delayed growth this spring, somewhat as it did with us this year. I was told there was only about a quarter the usual bloom. In the row of Stambach's Pacific Coast seedlings however, there were many flowers. Two very nice plants in particular, I encouraged them to segregate. Should they prove to be vigorous I'm sure we shall hear more of them. Of course there were many plants yet to flower and these may prove even better when seen next year. Because of his hybridizing over many years, few plants from his seed are without merit and George now has, in France, a living memorial.

George Stambach – A Legend In His Time

William Hawkinson

George Stambach is no longer gardening on this side; he hung up his spade and passed on to his maker on May 28, 1978. Although he is no longer here, his legend lives on. George was a native of Kentucky, but lived for many years in Pasadena and worked as a gardener. Some years back George introduced one of his tall bearded iris seedlings, a blue which he had named Kentucky Colonel. Even though he was interested in a host of plants, his main plant love was the Pacific coast native irises and over the years he grew many of them and carried on an active breeding program. Some of the Californicae hybrids that George will be remembered for are his BLACKEYED SUSAN, BLUE NECKLACE, GARDEN DELIGHT, INDIAN MAIDEN, INDIAN SUNSHINE, NATIVE PRINCESS, PACIFIC CHARMER, PASADENA INDIAN, WESTERN QUEEN and WILD CANARY. George was rightly proud of WESTERN QUEEN, winner of the Mitchell Award in 1976.

George Stambach believed in his native iris and he did everything he could to put them before the public. Each spring he exhibited them at the shows. He usually had a supply available for sale in one gallon size cans, both named cultivars and seedlings. Some years back he planted a portion of a shaded slope at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum in Arcadia, California, with a tremendous number of his seedlings and each spring they put forth a display of blooms. At almost any iris meeting one would encounter George, his pockets filled with packets of Californicae iris seeds which he gave to everyone who would plant them. He was a modern day Johnny Appleseed; I wonder how many seedlings grow in various gardens throughout the world. George told me he had the idea of giving such seeds from the late Sydney Mitchell.

We fondly remember the trips to George's garden to see his new seedlings, his asking me on one visit when he was not feeling well to make specific crosses for him; and his method of marking some of the choice seedlings: in addition to a seedling number he would put on the label, Bill Hawkinson likes it, Dick Sloan likes it, and such–all kind memories of a fine man.

Propagation of Iris Innominata

LEE W. LENZ

Adapted from the *Bulletin of the American Iris Society,* No. 123, October 1951.

In the relatively few years since its introduction into cultivation *Iris innominata* has increased in popularity to such an extent that today it is one of the most sought after of the species iris. Dr. Matthew C. Riddle has given an excellent account of this very beautiful little iris.

Propagation of *Iris innominata* is readily accomplished by seeds and the young plants may be expected to bloom the second year from fall-sown seed. However, during the past few years through hybridization and selection iris growers have developed many superior new forms which now come in a wide range of colors. Since these forms will not come true from seed it is necessary that they be propagated vegetatively if we are to maintain these new varieties. Vegetative propagation was for a long time considered a difficult way to propagate the West Coast irises and this is probably the main reason why our native species have not been more generally grown in California. Undoubtedly the main reason for much of the failure in the past has been that the plants have been moved at the wrong time, and even today some commercial growers attempt to handle them the way they do tall bearded iris.

As early as 1913 Dykes in his monumental work on the group, *The Genus Iris*, in discussing the propagation of the California irises wrote that "the paucity of their root fibres makes transplantation somewhat uncertain" and he further says, "It (transplanting) should therefore only be attempted during the months from April till July, when growth is active and before the main root thongs have grown out their lateral fibres. The nurseryman's habit of sending out all herbaceous plants in the autumn is fatal to these California Irises, and we can imagine that this is one reason why they are not more widely grown" A number of growers, among them Riddle (*Journ. Calif. Hort. Soc.* IX: 13-18, 1948), Mitchell *Iris for Every Garden* (1949), and Nies (*Bull. Am. Iris Soc.* No. 120, 1951) have all stressed the point that these plants must be moved only when they are beginning to make new root growth. In developing a breeding program with the California irises the author has had occasion to experiment with various ways of dividing and handling these plants, and the method described here is the one used at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden for propagating selected clones of *Iris innominata.*

Since it is often desirable to obtain as many divisions as possible from a single plant the entire clump is dug at the time when root growth is active and all the soil is then washed from the roots. In the tangle of roots shown can be seen the new white, thong-like, roots interspersed with the smaller, much-branched, brown roots produced the previous year. In dividing the plants it has been found advisable to remove most of the old roots in order to be able to separate the fans without breaking the new roots. The fans are then carefully broken apart, making certain that each division has at least one of the new roots. The small fans are then planted in four-inch pots and held until growth is active before placing them into the garden. From a two-year-old plant it has been possible to obtain anywhere from six to thirteen healthy divisions. It was found that it is easier to divide the plants before the new roots become too long and it is probably easiest when they are about two to three inches long.

Due to the mild winters in this area the young plants can be set out at almost any time during the winter or early spring and a number of them will bloom that spring.

The time of year when root growth is active varies, depending upon where the plants are grown and how they are handled. Here at the Botanic Garden the iris are allowed to remain in a state of aestivation during the summer months by withholding most of the water, and active root growth then normally begins during the late fall or early winter when the rains begin. There is also another period of active root formation in early spring. It was found that growth could be started early in the fall by watering the plants a few times, and for purely practical reasons, because there are fewer garden jobs to be done in the fall, a great deal of the digging and dividing has been done in September although it was continued as late as December. It is easy, however, to tell if the plants are ready for dividing by merely digging around the base of the plant with a small object and observing whether the new roots have started to develop. Even within a single planting some clumps will be ready before others. Some idea of when the plants are making new roots can be had by watching for the development of new fans since the two take place pretty much at the same time.

Under favorable conditions it is doubtful whether it would be necessary to start the divisions in pots before planting them out, but in this area where the weather conditions may be rather unfavorable during the fall and winter it has been considered the safest way to handle them. For the iris breeder who is dividing an especially fine plant for the first time it is suggested that the divisions be started in pots.

Dr. Sydney Mitchell in his book *Iris for Every Garden* suggested that possibly one way by which the California irises could be successfully handled by the commercial grower is to establish the plants in gallon cans as is done with many herbaceous plants. The writer fully agrees that this is undoubtedly the most satisfactory method for handling these plants since established plants can be moved from the cans to the garden without great fear of loss. In the case of *Iris innominata*, because of its small size, it seems that it would be possible to sell established plants in four-inch pots since the author's experience has shown that they are not injured by becoming somewhat pot-bound. Certainly a container larger than a six-inch pot or a two-quart can would not be necessary since the plants will bloom profusely in such containers. In this way the grower could, by watching his plants, divide them at the opportune time and then have healthy, well-established plants for his customers.

Pacific Irises in Gardens – A History

B. LEROY DAVIDSON

It is altogether fitting that our own Western American irises should have become so familiar in the British Isles, for it is well said that "All the best plants come from Britain, no matter where they originate." Were they not of quality, they would never have been given any notice there, nor gained favor anywhere.

Iris tenax was the first of the group to reach those shores. Grown from seed collected and sent back by David Douglas, probably from near Fort Vancouver on the Lower Columbia River, it was illustrated in 1829 in the Botanical Registry, and horticulture was introduced to one of the lovely new plants from North America. Certainly it must have brought a new concept to irises, being so very different from the already well-known "Great Blue Flags" of "Virginia." Soon some near-related species came to be known and grown in Germany, Holland and France, as well as England. But no great effort was expended either toward keeping any pure strains nor to development of superior hybrids, so that by the time any serious study of the genus *Iris* was commenced, they had been lost, either physically so, or at least lost in identity, and it was necessary to import new stocks.

It was Dykes and Perry, almost a century later following Leitchlin and Foster, who felt impelled to attempt all possible intercrosses of iris species and to record the results, yet nothing much in the way of superior garden plants resulted. It was only in quite recent times, with the exciting new hybrids grown by Fothergill and Mrs. Brummitt, that superiority of garden hybrids of these irises struck British horticulture, probably due to the strong infusion of an entirely new species having been found and grown in the interim. This was of course *Iris innominata*, which has not only become everyone's favorite but it is the cornerstone species of all the good garden strains.

With its discovery in 1928 and its publication as a species by Henderson in 1930, *Iris innominata* brought a new era to irisdom. Here was the epitome of grace in a small iris, which also proved to be easily grown. It was given the Award of Merit of the Royal Horticulture Society in 1936. When crossed to other species, its best qualities shone through or were even improved, and its one fault of a rather lax stalk was largely eliminated. Put to *I. douglasiana*, the result was an even more vigorous nature, a plant between the two in size, with polished glossy foliage and an array of flower colors unknown to either species.

Dr. Matthew Riddle is acknowledged as the great champion of *Iris innominata.* While on fishing trips in Southwestern Oregon he tucked into his lunch bag the best of those he found and established them in his garden. It occurs in both purple and yellow in pure stands, as well as in mad-riot mixtures where the two color forms merge. When Professor Sydney Mitchell was American Iris Society Chairman for Species, he once received a quart of seed from these plants, which was sent out to enthusiasts in the four corners of the world. Jean Stevens of New Zealand was among the recipients, and she was soon selecting seed strains, yellow, orange, red, violet, blue; and Fred Danks of Australia was shortly growing the Stevens' innominatas.

Mrs. English of Seattle, Washington made the first recorded crosses of *Iris innominata* and *douglasiana* (reported in "National Horticulture Magazine," October 1948) and gave the name *Iris* X *aureonymphea* to the resulting hybrids. The cross was planned to give a sturdier stem bearing the golden flowers, and was made in 1936. Several plants were selected for perpetuation, the first one being named "Golden Nymph." It is interesting to note that Lenz and others have reported finding this hybrid combination where the two species overlap in the wilds of coastal southwestern Oregon, and that all the good traits and beautiful blended colors of the garden hybrids are represented therein.

At about the same period, the Sydney Mitchell garden was astounding visitors with a decidedly fine new strain of *Iris douglasiana*; this derived in the main from a number of selections made by Fred DeForest who then lived in nearby Marin County. Seed of this was likewise sent out by Mitchell, some of it to Danks, who grew exciting things and crossed many onto his innominatas, sending seed back to Mitchell and to others This was probably the first intentional utilization of this classic cross, possibly predating Mrs. English's recorded work.

Enthusiasts, gathering in the Mitchell garden as they usually did, excited as bees near the hive, were non-plussed one day at the sight of a stupendous bronzy-purple iris flower which had been grown by Mrs. Hansen from seed sent her as wild Oregon irises. Professor Mitchell had found it to have double the usual number of chromosomes; a tetraploid *Iris douglasiana* it was called, but it may have been an example of *I. tenax*. It was sterile.

Meanwhile, several others in California had grown the Riddle innominata and DeForest-Mitchell douglasiana strains, and the bees were working at mixing them up. Noteworthy were Mrs. Cates of Berkeley and Bob Nourse of Ukiah. Nourse put certain other bloodlines into his, as the *Iris macrosiphon* of his area and possibly also *I. purdyi,* and seeds as well as plants went to the Mitchell garden.

Southern California irisarians had not been idle as their native irises became known at home. Eric Nies was growing some douglasiana of his own selection to which he later added the DeForest-Mitchell strain. His introductions show no taint of other species. Helen and Dick Luhrson were attracting considerable attention with their colorful hybrids derived from the Cates strain, which by now showed considerable douglasiana influence and a similar-appearing line was being grown by Mildred and David Lyons. Marion Walker came to possess the Nies stocks, to which he soon commenced adding innominata blood from the Danks and/or Nourse strains. Dr. Johnson was working at selecting a line of *douglasiana*, from plants of his own collecting. He was attracted by the adaptability of this species to Southern California's climate, especially tolerance of summer watering. George Stambach began developing his own strain, involving Luhrson and Lyons hybrids and Nies douglasiana; notable was his later use of "Claremont Indian." An attempt was made to explore the benefits *I. hartwegii australis* might bring, but it was soon obvious nothing was to be gained, at least for Southern California conditions—nothing not already inherent in the two basics, douglasiana and innominata.

During this time, Dr. Lenz was hard at his field work, observing and collecting the material to be established in the grounds of Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden. As this work first was to constitute a cytological study, it was necessary to obtain materials which conformed strictly to the original published species descriptions; thus, entirely new stocks were assembled. Along with the laboratory work and field work went the breeding work, the selection of which was to give us some of the most individual plants to date. *To* this time, the majority of the garden strains had been based on essentially identical lines. *From* this time, the Lenz lines were blended into most of the work to follow. The Lenz work experimented with perceiving what desirable traits might be inherited from each of the species and forms of these irises. The major emphasis came to be in the use of innominata and douglasiana, as in prior work, but bracteata and munzii were found to contribute traits upon which two "new" strains came to rely heavily; bracteata gave size, a good stalk and golden yellow color; munzii gave great vigor and blue color. Lenz once described his ideal hybrid as a thrifty plant, 12 - 18" high, with strongly erect stalks carrying full-petaled flowers well above tidy, evergreen, narrow foliage.

Jean Stevens had reported obtaining the bluest of irises among her *munzii* and was probably the first to use it in breeding when she crossed it to her *innominata.*

Back in England, Fothergill was making careful observations of progenies from Danks innominata and various douglasiana lines. His best things, though unbranched, inevitably resulted from innominata podded to douglasiana pollen. The reciprocal consistently proved to give no quality, and therefore branching stems went for naught. "This particular line of inter-specific breeding is perhaps the most promising that has appeared in the genus since the introduction of tetraploid tall bearded species," so enthused Mr. Herrick in the 1950 BIS Yearbook, on seeing Fothergill's results. Mrs. Brummitt was soon growing a similar line, which likewise was to win great praise and many awards. An infusion of Lenz-blooded strains was later added, and some lesser known species also figured in their lines (i.e., *fernaldii*, presumably for its stiffly erect stalk. She feels that Lenz's "Pacific Splendor" gave her things great individuality. Gardeners from all over the British Isles were now clamoring for these delightful new irises, which, they were told, grew so readily they'd soon have lawns of them!

Meanwhile the Mitchell garden in Berkeley produced an annual crop of seedlings that was shared with Bay Region gardeners, the poorer ones rogued so the bees would have only the best to work with. As a student working in the garden following Professor Mitchell's death, Jack Craig was given permission to rescue whatever he wished, and soon he was intercrossing Mitchell's bee seedlings, some of which had falls exceeding two inches in breadth! Jack moved to Japan; before doing so, the better seedlings passed into other hands, Joe Ghio and Roy Davidson being among the recipients.

Craig had also entered into a joint breeding venture with Elwood Molseed, a young native of Mendocino County, who had collected and interbred some of the best iris from his area, including purdyi and macrosiphon and some extraordinary douglasiana (pansy-black, for example). Also utilized had been both blue and white forms of the exceedingly robust (4 - 5 foot) form of *douglasiana*, once known as "Watsoniana," this from the Bowman garden in Fort Bragg where he had been employed. They also used pollens from Walker's strain (of the "Ojai"-period) and from Lenz' strains, particularly those based on munzii and bracteata. Thus the Mitchell-Craig strain evolved into the Craig-Molseed strain. It should have produced spectacular things, particularly as the selections were exploited; but tragedies struck. The plants were moved with many losses; Molseed died; Craig, having returned, rescued survivors, few labels intact. Some went to Davidson who sees them as an exceptionally vigorous strain, even in a cool, wet climate. Some went to Japan where they thrive in a wet-summer climate. Joe Ghio has developed from them a unique, award-worthy strain through combination with his selections of the native Santa Cruz irises, apparently a group of douglasiana-microsiphon or douglasiana-fernaldii natural hybrids found in nearby areas.

There were other people growing these same kinds of iris and raising seedlings but little of their work ever reached the iris registry. In the Northwest some enthusiasts have concentrated on a different approach, though still through using innominata. California-bred strains utilizing douglasiana produce too much unwanted foliage in proportion to floral rewards when grown in that cooler, wetter climate. The indigenous tenax would seem capable of contributing every good quality given by douglasiana to Southern strains, but tidier, smaller plant habit.

Landscape Use of Native Iris as Groundcover

Frederick C. Boutin

Two extensive plantings of Pacific Coast iris in the Huntington Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California, have proved the value of these iris as groundcover and landscape subjects. The plantings, each about twenty years old, are associated with camellias and other plants of similar requirements and each receives light to heavy shade.

Easily accessible to visitors is the planting along the exit walk from the Bonsai Court and Zen Garden. Here Pacific Coast iris form a meadow-like area under and around large camellias, cherries, bamboo and Coast live oak. The irises have the admirable quality of absorbing the considerable litter of small to medium sized leaves. Under large-leaved shade trees they might be less successful in this.

The second planting is in an area closed to visitors but it can be viewed from the roadway north of the Garden Pavillion in the upper end of the Japanese Garden canyon. Here Pacific Coast iris are planted on a steep north-facing roadcut bank, roughly six feet high by one hundred feet long, shaded by a high canopy of live oak. Irrigation comes from seepage and overspray from sprinklers on camellias farther up the slope. The iris provide an attractive year-round low maintenance cover for the bank and, of course, a highlight of flowers in the spring. Pacific Coast iris are shallow rooted and, if planted on a steep bank in soil looser than this, may need rétaining with wire mesh while becoming established.

These plantings are the successful result of the interest and work of William Wylam, for many years a head gardener for the Huntington and now retired. The stability and low maintenance of these plantings and their attractiveness emphasize that Pacific Coast iris have many desirable qualities as landscape subjects.

(continued from page 6)

It was once speculated that branched douglasiana would contribute greater floriferousness through its ability to give ten or more buds per stem. In reality, this has not proved to be the case; most of these irises are unbranched, producing multiple stems as if the branching were translocated to the rhizome as a function. The resulting effect is far more pleasing in garden hybrids as in wild plants. Many have but a single bud, making ideal cutting material both for house decoration and show arrangements, certainly an attractive attribute.

This Northwest strain, if it can be so-called, is then largely the result of tenax-innominata combination and segregation. It is yet in the developmental stage (1972)* and quite unproved elsewhere. It should give more cold-resistance, and possibly will prove advantageous in other cool, wet areas. Certainly it has no future where either of these two species proves unsuited, as in Southern California, for instance. An extensive collection of species representatives in many forms, a good number of collected natural hybrids (some with color and pattern unknown in any species), and as many registered or named cultivars as can be found, had been established by a group effort at Bellevue, Washington, for study and comparison. It is easily seen from observation there that *douglasiana* is the most malleable of the group. Certain others, indigenous to California, do not adapt easily, either as transplants or seed-grown. *Iris hartwegii* in all its variety has been disappointing, and *I. macrosiphon* seems entirely unsuited. Possibly these insist on long-day summer baking in a heavier soil; perhaps they might contribute something to a garden strain suited to south-west conditions.

As would be entirely logical, species found growing in the Northwest in nature are perfectly suited to North-west garden conditions, including *I. chrysophylla* as well as the two already mentioned. This latter species seems to contribute brilliance of color and precocious flowering habit to a small and tidy hybrid plant. A large colony that appears similar in all respects except color is the early orchid-flowering one found near Eugene, Oregon, by Delora Thompson Smith, and known by the tentative name of "Notiensis."

Registrations of Zelne Quigley and Ruth Hardy are notable since they represent garden-proved collected plants of pure species derivation. The Hubbard cultivars are similar in being non-hybrid, but arose as garden seedlings from selected wild plants.

There is much to be said for the future of these irises, and although Mr. Herrick may have been over-praising, it is certain that there is a lot of excitement in their garden possibilities. It is likewise an assurance that their individualities will not be soon subdued in one great development with cast-iron constitution and huge blossoms. There is material here for many kinds and many garden uses, from bold and durable landscape plants to diminutive rock garden subjects. And as a good part of the most promising recent hybrid work is still but a very few generations away from wild-flower status, all, or most, of what is here chronicled having taken place within the past forty years, it should illustrate the value of maintaining the wildflower look to this inherently graceful group of irises.

*Successes have recently been reported in many eastern American gardens.

Native Irises in the Santa Cruz Mountains

MARJORIE G. SCHMIDT

—Adapted from *Journal of the California Horticultural Society* (now *Pacific Horticulture*) Vol. XX, No. 2; reproduced with permission.

Of all the engaging, free-flowering and colorful woodland plants, the native irises are the most abundant and most easily recognized. They add a full measure of beauty to wood, forest, meadow and coastal plain. Not to know their charm is to miss much of the beauty of the western landscape. In addition there has been the excitement of finding new flower colors and new natural hybrids on local field trips. Even in areas which I had assumed were well botanized, I have had the pleasure of fascinating *discoveries.*

It is a well-known fact that *Iris douglasiana* grows to perfection south as well as north of San Francisco. It flourishes in the Santa Cruz Mountains and then southward as far as Santa Barbara County. Each color or detail of marking seems more attractive than the last, even when one has been observing and recording them for many years. There is very little variation in the robust growth habit and the fountains of tough, dark green leaves. One spring I had the pleasure of a trip to a very remote part of the Santa Cruz Mountains. In this quiet primeval setting the immense Douglas firs and towering redwoods grew as they might have in the very beginning. The forest floor was well planted with many characteristic shrubs and perennials. First to catch the eye were the wide, handsome leaves of *Clintonia andrewsiana* with flower spikes just forming; next the sturdy stalks of *Trillium ovatum* with the fat capsules already formed; on every bank, carpets of *Viola sempervirens* with round leaves and brilliant yellow flowers; and everywhere the shiny-leaved huckleberry, *Vaccinium ovatum.* Through it all the Douglas iris spread tremendous plantations and produced a breath-taking array of flowers. This particular region had a preponderance of plants bearing delicate grey-blue flowers—a rather rare color. But, around the bend and over the knoll, other characteristic colors were found, including a creamy-white marked with a yellow crest on the fall.

This most versatile of native plants assumes different forms in varying exposures. Along Summit Road *Iris douglasiana* often strays from the sheltering forest, and here the clumps remain low, blown by foggy winds during much of the year. On the sea-facing slopes the Douglas iris forms thick, low mats which creep around through the dwarf coyote brush, beach asters and sea pinks. For some unknown reason, the characteristic color of these coastal forms tends toward the deeper shades of blue-purple to a deep pansy-purple. One spring I made a number of trips to the coast, in the region between Pescadero and Pigeon Point, to make a check of the flower colors. While a somewhat paler lavender-purple does occur, the deeper shades prevail in the regions I visited. The usual variations in markings were noted, white and gold stripes on the falls, with a few rare ones having an eye-spot of royal-purple. Away from the coast, the flower color is not so deep, the flowers presenting a full range of characteristic colors. These include many tints of lavender, pink-lavender, lilac, azure, straw-yellow and white.

A great surprise in iris discoveries came one year when I found the Douglas iris growing on Fremont Peak. The redwood tree does not grow there, at least to my knowledge. Bigcone and digger pines, oaks and an interesting mixed chaparral comprise the main plants on the peak. To date I have found two plantations of Douglas iris, the first along the road toward the top, and the second an extensive patch beyond the picnic area. The flower colors there are the common ones of lavenders and purples, and some mixtures. Although the Douglas iris often strays from a strictly redwood community, this occurrence would seem to be a long way from its natural environment. It would be of interest to know if the redwood tree might have grown on Fremont Peak in a past geological era.

Iris macrosiphon gets into the Santa Cruz Mountains only by the occurrence of a few scattered clumps on the eastern fringe of the mountains. Here I have found widely-spaced, isolated plantations growing in a mixed oak and chaparral community. It was all the more exciting to find *I. macrosiphon* because at one time it was thought not to be native south of Marin County. However, it is recorded in *Flora of the Mount Hamilton Range* by Helen K. Sharsmith. There is one large plantation on a flank of the mountain, near Smith Creek Ranger Station, beginning on an exposed ridge and extending up the slope to the light shade of decidous oaks.

Iris macrosiphon is probably better known as the ground iris, forming rather sparse plants with narrow blueish-green foliage. The lovely violet-blue flowers are almost stemless, with only one or two flowering stems to each plant. There are some delightful color variations from the characteristic violet-blue. One noted last spring was a deep vivid blue, almost a navy blue, and a rare find was a pink-violet shade. The falls are usually striped with white and yellow lines, but just as often the flowers are self-colored, and unmarked.

Beginning about where *Iris macrosiphon* leaves off, and growing all through the Santa Cruz Mountains is a relative of the ground iris formerly called *I. amabilis.* It was so named by Alice Eastwood many years ago, but is now listed as *I. fernaldii.* It is abundant throughout the mountains, growing on half-shaded areas of mixed forests in which oak and madrone usually predominate. It makes a vigorous plant, slightly smaller perhaps than the robust Douglas iris, but much larger than *I. macrosiphon.* The foliage is pale green, narrow as in *I. macrosiphon*, but much longer. The flower stems are generously borne, held almost as high as the foliage. According to the exposure of the plants, flowers may be found any time from mid-February until early May. The characteristic flower color is straw-yellow, veined with faint lines in lavender, claret or mahogany color. A rare exception is a large flower with wide falls intricately veined in a deep wine or brownish color, appearing to be a solid mahogany shade. If seeds are wanted, one must be careful to mark a stand having these deeper colors as

One of George Stambach's Pacific Coast iris seedlings showing great promise; pictured is its maiden bloom, Spring, 1978, at the International Iris Congress, Orleans, France.

Thoolen photo.

they occur so rarely. It is amazing to me that a plant so floriferous, and with the extra challenge of color variation, should not be more generally used as a garden plant.

Although I have never found *Iris douglasiana* and *I. macrosiphon* growing together, there is an extensive area in the Santa Cruz Mountains where an iris occurs having the characteristics of both species. It is an interesting theory that at some time in their evolution these two species combined to form this hybrid which I call the Empire Iris. This iris occurs along Empire Grade, being especially abundant at the north end of the road where it follows the high ridge of the Ben Lomond Mountains, and on to Eagle Rock. The Empire Iris is about intermediate between the two species, with clumps more robust than *I. macrosiphon*, but with quite narrow, blue-green foliage. The clumps are free-flowering, producing flowers during April in a wide color range. While this color range is very similar to the Douglas iris, there is a subtle difference in the shades and tones which I have called *chalk pastels*. The most common hue is a pink-beige, liberally striped with white lines the full length of the falls. Other colors include straw-yellow, dusty-rose-pink, violet, lavender, pale blue, and pure white. At the other end of the color range is a purple shade, but this varies by having a white eye zone on the fall, and narrow white margins on all flower parts. Gay flowers, large for the plant size and decorated with lines or netted veins, they often have wavy-margins on both falls and standards. I dwell on the subject of color partly because they are distinctive and unusual in the western species, and partly because I think that the Empire Iris has great potential value as a garden plant. Seedlings brought to flowering stage have yielded a high percent of the pink-beige color, but more seed will be collected and planted each year. The Empire Iris grows in association with oak, madrone, various manzanitas, *Ceanothus incanus*, and a rare stand of *C. integerrimus*.

Virtually in our own backyard we have *Iris longipetala*, a narrow endemic plant native from Mendocino County south to Monterey. It is listed as growing in a number of areas within the city by Mr. Howell in *A Flora of San Francisco*. Early botanists recorded it as being abundant in moist places. Unfortunately it can no longer be found in such generous quantities, and this fact should give it a special place in our affections. *I. longipetala* now seems relegated to occasional stands in Mendocino County and moist slopes south of San Francisco. I have recently noted a few plants along the coast road between Pescadero and Santa Cruz. But road widening activities here might mean the end of it in this section. The sad knowledge that this iris seems destined to become even more rare makes me eager to grow this, as well as other native plants, so that they will not be lost forever.

Iris longipetala, usually called the coast iris, is a two-foot, stout plant, having tough blue-green leaves. The flowers, which appear any time between early February and late April, are a lovely violet-blue, net veined on the falls. The leaves are not strictly evergreen, dying back in the fall, but appearing again so early in the spring as to hardly have been missed. I have found the coast iris to be a very satisfactory garden plant, a fine companion for native shrubs and perennials.

By way of conclusion, I cannot resist a plea for more general use of the native irises in the garden. In my experience the western native irises have been very adaptable and rewarding garden plants. For shade, or partial high shade, among shrubs, or in a hardy border—with or without water—they respond to practically any garden situation. Surely these plants which have graced the woodlands for untold ages deserve to be recognized, and to have a place in the garden.

Native Irises in Mendocino County

ELWOOD MOLSEED*

—Adapted from *Journal of the California Horticultural Society* (now *Pacific Horticulture*) Vol. XX, No. 2; reproduced with permission.

Mendocino County is richly endowed with native irises. Most of these are species of the beardless type, belonging to a subdivision of the Beardless, or *Apogon*, Subsection of irises—called the Series *Californicae*.

In the wild they put on a most spectacular show! There are only three species of the *Californicae* in Mendocino County, but after seeing all the varying forms to be found in the wild, one would wonder how all the variations could be consolidated into three species. To be sure, they really cannot be, and much of the variation is due to natural hybridization—to be discussed later. The three species in Mendocino are *Iris douglasiana, I. macrosiphon,* and *I. purdyi.*

Everyone is familiar with *Iris douglasiana.* It is the purple iris we associate with the cliffs near the ocean. Its distribution is by no means limited to the coast, though. It is found almost throughout Mendocino County, its range being much broader than that of the other species found here. The range of color of this iris in Mendocino County is from light purple to deep, black-purple—although the color is quite variable in this species as it extends from southern Oregon to Santa Barbara County. The species is a vigorous grower, and will grow in sun or shade in just about any type of soil. On the coast it begins blooming in March, and flowers can be found inland as late as July. It may be interesting to some to note that in the vicinity of Point Arena there is found a narrow-leaved, wiry-stemmed form—once called *I. douglasiana* var. *mendocinensis* by Alice Eastwood.

Iris macrosiphon is probably the most variable and most widely distributed of all the *Californicae*, but in Mendocino County it is all of one general type. The flower color is probably the bluest of all the irises in the county, ranging from pale blue to a deep purple-blue. The foliage varies from three inches to twelve inches in height, is usually glaucous and very grassy in appearance. One of the interesting features of this iris is the fact that the stems are sometimes so short, and the perianth-tube so long, that the seed pods are often formed just barely above the ground—while the flowers may be several inches above the ground! This species is spread the full length of Mendocino County, but seems to like summer heat and doesn't come closer than about twenty miles to the ocean. The species is especially plentiful along the road between Hopland and McDonald's Fork on California Highway 128. It is very often found blooming in close association with masses of the yellow fairy lantern, *Calochortus pulchellus*, and blue brodiaeas and occasionally with the firecracker brodiaea, *Brodiaea idamaia. I. macrosiphon* makes a very good rock garden plant.

In our neighboring Lake County *Iris macrosiphon* takes on a warm apricot-yellow hue, a color found in this species only in this area. The species hybridizes in nature with the other species, and these hybrids will be mentioned in connection with *I. purdyi.*

Undoubtedly the most spectacular iris in Mendocino County is *Iris purdyi*. Thinking of it brings to mind vivid pictures of great drifts of bobbing cream-colored flowers in the short grasses under the high shade of California live oaks—just northwest of Cloverdale on California Highway 128. At this particular spot the species almost outdoes itself with vigor! The stems are fourteen to twenty inches high, and the flowers spread to seven inches across. *I. purdyi* is known as the redwood iris, although it does not restrict itself to redwood forests. The species can easily be found along the Redwood Highway, U.S. Highway 101, from Humboldt County to as far south as the redwoods extend into Mendocino County, and on most of the sideroads going to the coast from U.S. Highway 101 in Mendocino and northern Sonoma counties.

The typical color of *Iris purdyi* is creamy-yellow with rose veining on the falls. The typical form has stems from two to ten inches, and low, grassy foliage. A good area to look for it is on the road between Willits and Fort Bragg, California Highway 20. The typical form is extremely well adapted for the sunny or the shady rock garden. This species also likes summer heat, and will not be found growing near the ocean.

There is another rather distinct form of *Iris purdyi* which is at its best along the road from Leggett Valley to the coast, and on the ridge on the road between Branscomb and the coast. The ground color is white, instead of cream-yellow, and the veining is lavender-pink, often diffusing through the flower to give an overall effect of pink. The color may even become an intense purple-magenta on the white ground. The flowers are very flat, but otherwise this form is very similar to the typical form.

Natural hybrids really add spice and variety to iris collecting. The range of each of the above-mentioned species merges and overlaps in many areas and natural hybrids are very commonly seen. For instance above the water fountain of California Highway 128 just out of Cloverdale, *Iris macrosiphon* and *I. purdyi* grow together. The hybrids and intergrades range in an endless combination of colors. Many of the hybrids are of great beauty, combining the best qualities of both species and possessing qualities not found in either. Here, where the cream *I. purdyi* comes in contact with the blue-purple *I. macrosiphon*, the hybrids and intergrades often have the pale yellow ground color of *I. purdyi*, and the deep purple-blue from *I. macrosiphon* will be in the form of

*Elwood Wendell Molseed was born in coastal northern California. He received his doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1965. He was interested in all members of the iris family, but particularly in the evansias and the Pacific Coast irises. He was a recognized authority on the genus *Tigridia*, on which he wrote his doctoral thesis. *Tigridia molseediana* was named for him. He was an assistant professor of Biology at the University of San Francisco when he died in April, 1967, of cancer at age 28.

Roy Oliphant

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(continued from page 10)

veins or general diffusion. The contrast of the dark blue and pale yellow is quite striking. The *I. purdyi* found in this area is the robust form mentioned above, and often the vigor and size of this parent are retained in these hybrids of the different color.

In many areas *Iris douglasiana* grows with *I. purdyi* (e.g. on the road between Willits and Fort Bragg, California Highway 20). It is of interest to note that while *I. douglasiana* and *I. macrosiphon* are often very similar in color, the *purdyi-douglasiana* hybrids and intergrades often range in color from a flesh pink to a light red-violet. This may not always be the case, but its occurrence is common.

In some areas *Iris macrosiphon* and *I. douglasiana* grow together, and of course there are hybrids and intergrades, usually intermediate between the two species. In a few areas all three species can be found growing together, and hybrids and intergrades of every sort imaginable are to be found. Dr. Lee Lenz reports such an area on the Faulkner Park road southwest of Boonville.*

There is another iris in Mendocino County that must be mentioned. It is *Iris longipetala*, of the *Longipetalae* Series of the *Apogon* Subsection of irises. It grows in only one small area in Mendocino County, near the fork in California Highway 128 leading to Hopland (mentioned above as McDonald's Fork–also known as the Mountain House). It grows in the stream bed, forming a solid mat for at least one hundred yards. This site is considered to be the northernmost extent of the species.

Growing the *Californicae* is a simple matter once the plants are established. Transplanting these species irises is difficult, but can be done reasonably safely between the months of December and March. The roots must never dry out. *Grow seeds if at all possible.* Seedlings are very easily transplanted and will bloom the second year after germination. In the wild, the best specimen plants are found in the sun, especially where an area has been logged and the sun let in on the previously shaded plants. The reason for this seems to be that the seedlings need some protection from the hot sun to get started, but once established, grow best in full sun. For this reason it is common to find many irises scattered under trees and shrubs, but a few very vigorous plants in full sun. Thus a clue to their culture.

*Lenz, L. W. 1958. A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises. El Aliso, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 25.

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The World of Irises, published by The American Iris Society, Wichita, Kansas, 1978.

Introductory chapter on Classification by Dr. Lee Lenz; Chapter 13, The Pacific Coast Hybrids, by the late Dr. Clarke Cosgrove; comments on Cal-Sibe hybrids by Jean A. Witt. Illustrations include watercolors by Jean Witt and both black and white and color pictures of Pacific Coast natives.

1979 price, $15.00. Order from Dorothy Howard, 226 E -20th St, Tulsa, OK 74119; checks payable to the American Iris Society.

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SPCNI TREASURER'S REPORT
November 26, 1978

Balance July 1, 1978			$491.33
Receipts			
Dues:			
Annual Individual	$119.00		
Triennial Individual	144.00		
Stationery & Cards	11.50		
Checklists	28.00		
Cohen Book	2.00		
	$304.50		$795.83
Disbursements			
President's Expense (Thoolen)		$ 7.67	
Books Purchased from B.I.S.		32.97	
Treasurer's Expenses			
File Box & Cards		1.74	
		$42.38	$753.45
Balance November 26, 1978			$753.45

Charles R. Hopson

The Big Bonanza

William Hawkinson

There is a big bonanza awaiting the hunters of garden gems when they find the iris treasures to be had from the McCaskill's. Although their introduction might well have been announced with the blaring of trumpets, they made a quiet debut. In 1977 the McCaskills introduced: BIG BONANZA, an exhibition certificate winner–18 inches tall, cream ground, washed and veined with lilac purple and finished with a gold signal. BLUE BIRD CANYON, 18" blue bird blue with a yellow center and a purple signal. FLAMENCO QUEEN, 18", a light cream with violet flush and veins and stamped with a yellow signal. FRANCISCAN PADRE, 16" buttercup yellow, veined and flushed imperial purple, plus a yellow signal. GABRIELINO INDIAN, 15" a salmon beauty overlaid and veined enythrite red. MISTY LAVENDER, 15" an aster violet beauty with a small yellow signal. NATIVE PAISANO, 12"–a parchment ground veined and overlaid rose-purple and finished off with a yellow fan.

The 1978 season saw the release of: CALIFORNIA SUNSHINE, 18" straw yellow ground veined and washed with pansy violet. CALIFORNIA YANKEE, 18" a naples-yellow beauty–its standards are veined grey-blue touched off by a gold streaked midrib, falls veined in beetroot purple with a gold fan. PERSIAN SHAWL, 15" neyron rose with rose veining and a golden fan outlined Persian violet.

Previous introductions of the McCaskills which have found favor with irisarians are CHIMES, FAIRY CHIMES, and CASILDA. They also introduced GRUBSTAKE, RIPPLE ROCK, and CANYON SNOW for their respective originators.

This bonanza has been provided for you by that modest, kind gentleman Vern McCaskill. Vern is a master plantsman held in deep respect by the horticulturists and nurserymen who know him. For many years Vern has operated a nursery primarily devoted to the propagation of azaleas and camellias and the hybridizing of camellias. He has contributed tremendously to the advancement of the camellia. Some of our particular favorites among his camellia originations are the prize winning whites, Coronation and White Nun. Due to the nature of camellia hybridizing–the years it takes to realize what your efforts have wrought–Vern switched to a faster flower–the Californicae iris and we are all the richer for it.

The year 1979 also holds promise of being a vintage year. We will be treated to MISSION MUSIC which is 15", done up in pale cobalt violet, plus veining and cream fan with a center streak of yellow .... plus four other 1979 introductions, sweet music for collectors of Californicae iris by McCaskill.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The *Almanac* of the
Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris
Olive Rice, Editor
1914 Napa Avenue
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THIRD CLASS
TIME VALUE MAIL